**Dame Doctor Denise Coia**

The College in Scotland was deeply saddened to hear that former Chair, Dr Denise Coia DBE, passed away on 9 April 2020.

Paying tribute on social media, RCPsych in Scotland’s current Chair, Professor John Crichton commented “her extraordinary contribution to psychiatry, as well as the wider medical profession, can only be described as unmatched”. The immense list of all of her achievements and her impact on the profession is difficult to condense, but her accomplishments were ultimately recognised when included in the Queen’s Birthday Honours in 2016 for services to mental health and healthcare quality improvement.

Initially a Consultant Psychiatrist working for Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board, Dame Coia always had an interest in improving the delivery of mental health services, and set up several community teams and services in South Glasgow. From 1998, in addition to her clinical post, she worked for the Director of Planning and Implementation for Greater Glasgow Health Board within a joint social work/NHS mental health commissioning team. Its remit was to develop a ‘modernising mental health strategy’, focusing on shifting the balance of care from hospital to community settings. She designed specialist intensive community services providing an alternative to inpatient care; and keen to provide better support for young people with mental illness, she introduced early intervention services, leading the development in the treatment of people who present to acute hospitals with physical problems but who also have underlying mental health problems by delivering a new liaison psychiatry service and a self-harm nursing liaison team.

Dame Coia was also an active member within her Royal College, taking up the Officer’s role of RCPsych in Scotland Meetings Secretary in 1997, before becoming Vice Chair, then Chair from 2001-2005. During that term, she was instrumental in collating the views of psychiatrists regarding the proposals for the Mental Health (Care and Treatment)(Scotland) Act 2003.

Thereafter, acting as Principal Medical Officer for Mental Health for the Scottish Government from 2006-2011, Dame Coia was involved with working across a number of policy and performance directorates to support the development and delivery of national policy. During this tenure, in 2010, she was appointed Chair of the new national health body Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS), whilst also adopting the role of Board member for the Care Inspectorate, its sister organisation.

Since 2017, she had been convener of Children in Scotland, the national agency for organisations working with children and their families. Latterly, she was asked to chair the Children & Young People’s Mental Health Task Force before stepping down in 2019 because of ill health. The taskforce was jointly commissioned by the Scottish Government & COSLA in June 2018 to identify the best way forward for children and young people’s mental health services in Scotland.

During her career, she has also held the roles of Senior Honorary Lecturer, Glasgow University Department of Psychological Medicines (1987-2011); Vice Chair of the Academy of Royal Colleges of Scotland (2002-2006); GMC Assessor, Supervisor and Advisor to Fitness to Practice Committees; and Chair, GMC Quality Scrutiny Board (London). In addition, from 1987 – 2012 she was involved in a voluntary capacity as a member of Support in Mind Scotland.

Scotland’s First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, wrote on social media that Coia’s “contribution to medicine, psychiatry and public service in Scotland was immense”. She was indeed a leader in the field of mental health, instrumental in the design and delivery of transformational mental health services; initially in the Glasgow area, and then nationally through her appointments in both government and senior public bodies. Consequently, the influence of her work has spread internationally.

She will be a great, great loss to the profession.

Colleagues remember her kindness and sense of fun, her sense of humour, approachability and consistent generosity with encouragement.

Our thoughts and sincere condolences are with her family and friends at this difficult time.

If you have any personal comments or tributes you wish to make, please send contributions to Angela.currie@rcpsych.ac.uk. The College in Scotland will be gathering a book of condolences.